

**ORGANIZING AND HOLDING  
A  
FOLK FESTIVAL**

**Recreation Section  
DIVISION OF RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT  
Jefferson City, Missouri**

NOTE

This material has been prepared as a brief guide for preparation and management of a folk festival. It should not be regarded as a complete reference. Neither should it convey the idea that a festival (particularly at first and in smaller communities) must always be highly organized. The main objective is to provide a worthwhile event, interesting to all.

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STEPS  
IN  
ORGANIZING AND HOLDING  
A FOLK FESTIVAL

1) Arouse interest in festival in community

Reasons for festival:

- a) An interesting event for local folks.
- b) An attraction to visitors in the area.
- c) A means of preserving worthwhile customs and traditions of the past.
- d) Valuable to young people for educational meaning and connection with early history.
- e) A means of encouraging folk dancing and singing as a recreational pastime the year around.

2) Secure backing of community. In a large town this might be the city government or a special association organized for the purpose. In a small town it probably should be the chamber of commerce backed by the service clubs, schools and other organizations.

3) Organize to put the festival on.

Select the following:

- a) General chairman and executive committee
- b) Festival director - to be a member of executive committee
- c) Publicity and information committee
- d) Arrangements committee
- e) Program committee
- f) Stage and properties committee

4) Get busy. Hold the festival. Make it an annual event.

GETTING THE JOB DONE

### Executive Committee

The general chairman and executive committee have the general responsibility of promoting and putting on the festival. They should work to secure complete backing in the community and to get the cooperation of all groups and people.

The committee should select the festival director and committee heads.

The festival director and committee chairmen should be placed on the executive committee when selected, if they are not already members of the executive group.

### Festival Director

The festival director can contribute much toward making the festival a big success. This person--man or woman--should be on the executive committee, and should have charge of pulling the various preparations together into a complete presentation. He should also be chairman of the program committee and direct the performance, acting as commentator for each of the numbers presented.

The director should have a reasonably good knowledge of what is genuine, and should be able to do a good job of managing--with the skill and tact necessary for handling the performers and the festival generally.

It will be necessary for the director to arrange the program so that the festival runs smoothly, has variety and audience appeal, and keeps to schedule.

Assistants--of the director's own choosing--are needed for aiding in a smooth presentation, to keep performers on hand and ready, to instruct the stage and property crew, and generally keep things moving.

## Matters of Arrangements and Policy

### for Decision by Executive Committee

Location - A festival can be held with success in anyone of several different settings--a natural amphitheatre, and auditorium, a theatre, a stadium, a field. It should not be presented--if at all possible--in such a big setting that the value of the presentation will be lost. It is better to have several performances--if the public's reception is good--than to have too big a crowd at one performance. This is a problem that may not be encountered the first time a festival is put on, but should be considered when plans are made.

If the time of the year is suitable an outdoor setting is most desirable because of the natural and informal atmosphere it creates. It would be well to have arrangements made for use of indoor facilities in event bad weather prevents the use of the outdoor location.

Time of festival - Time of day is of importance primarily if only one performance is to be held. In the case of just one performance, evening is probably the best time. If several performances are scheduled, local conditions can best determine whether there should be afternoon and evening programs, or performances on several evenings.

Time of year should be considered from the point of view of comfort and attendance. Spring and fall are desirable for either indoor or outdoor festivals, with the earliness or lateness of the season governing the location. Summertime is satisfactory for outdoor festivals only.

"Selling" performers - Persuasion may be necessary to get some of the local folks to perform. Such hesitancy sometimes comes from the idea that people don't appreciate the value of old songs and dances, and attend a performance to laugh at the performers. This idea is frequently encountered in areas which have not had festivals. This erroneous impression should be overcome through explanations in publicity and personal contacts on the part of everyone connected with the festival.

Admission charges - The question of admission charges should be carefully considered. Because a folk festival should be "of, for, and by the people" every effort should be made to give all

people a chance to attend. If the festival can be held without charging for it--so much the better. If the expenses incident to handling the event require admission charges, the price of admission should be kept low. In towns the charge can be from 25¢ to 50¢. In small cities it might be necessary to charge more--possibly 50¢ to 75¢--because expenses might be higher. Only in our several large cities should there ever be a need for charging \$1.00 or more.

The question of awards - Some places which hold festivals make a practice of awarding prizes. When this is done the festival becomes a contest rather than a folk performance. The awarding of prizes also has a tendency to discourage some people with good talent who believe they aren't good enough to compete.

Because one of the purposes of a festival is to preserve the best of the past and encourage folk activities for the pleasure derived from them, it should be quite unnecessary to give prizes. Anyone with talent who is genuinely interested in folk activities should take pride in contributing to the success of a festival without thinking of a reward. A real folk singer, player, or dancer usually does his bit for the pleasure it gives him and others. This is the way it should be. After all, a festival is just a case of folks getting together--in a larger group than usual--for the purpose of everyone having a good time.



Publicity and Information Committee

Publicize the festival, and explain what it is and what it means. This should be done through newspapers, radio and any other means of securing publicity and advertising. Talks to civic groups and schools would do much to help put over understanding and support.

Arrangements Committee.

Secure the place for the festival and see that all preparations at the location are made for handling of the public (seating, parking, refreshments, lights, ushers, tickets, if admission is charged, sale of tickets, etc.).

## Program Committee

Secure people (through publicity and by personal contact) who will take part in the festival. The program should include square dancing, any other folk dancing, ballad singing, play party games, fiddling, old time religious singing, jigging, folk specialities, instruments used in former times or still used--as the banjo, guitar, mandolin, zither, Jews harp, mouth harp, dulcimer, etc.

The performers might be old-timers or they might be younger folks who have learned from the old timers. Whatever a performer does should be a GENUINE folk performance. Cowboy and modern "hillbilly" songs don't really belong in Missouri so far as traditional folk activity is concerned. They are all right in their place but that place would not be a traditional Missouri folk festival.

The work of this committee is quite important. The success of the festival depends on how well the program committee does its job and understands the need for presenting the true flavor of the customs and traditions of the earlier days. The songs and dances of the Scots, Irish, German, Swiss, Polish, Russians, Czechs, Negroes, and others, should not be overlooked if there are individuals or groups available which have had the native songs and dances handed down to them by their forebears.

If any costumes are worn by participants they should belong to the song or dance which is being presented. Again--the cowboy belongs to the West and a cowboy costume doesn't fit into a Missouri folk festival and a revival of Missouri's traditions.

All participants should understand the need for holding their performance to a set amount of time. The amount of time to be used by each "act" varies according to the type of thing presented. Ordinarily a schedule of time on different types should approximate the following:

- Solo singing - 2 to 4 minutes (depending on variety).
- Small group singing - 2 to 4 minutes (depending on variety).
- Large group (choral) singing - 5 to 7 minutes if songs have variety.
- Solo dances - 3 to 4 minutes (less if only one type of dance).
- Instrumentalists (solo or groups) - 2 to 4 minutes (depending on variety).
- Group dancing and play party games - 4 to 8 minutes (depending on variety).
- Specialities (recitations, animal imitations, etc.) - 2 to 4 minutes, depending on variety.

It can be seen from the timing schedule that the committee has two main problems--one, to provide an authentic presentation for the audience; the other, to prevent the program from being so long that it becomes "too much of a good thing" at one sitting.

The length of the whole program for any one full performance should not exceed  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours at the very most. The number and types of individual performances will have to be taken into consideration. In some cases a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hour program would be sufficient. A program which is much longer than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours should have an intermission.

### Stage and Properties Committee :

Provide the proper setting for the presentation of the festival. If on an outdoor stage or platform the lighting problems will probably be of more concern than if an indoor stage is used. An ample quantity of chairs for performers should be on hand, in addition to a well tuned piano and a public address system (with several microphones, if possible).

Some decoration with flowers and plants is desirable but should not be elaborate. Simplicity goes along with a folk festival.

A spot light can be used to advantage if handled properly. In this connection it should be remembered that a festival is not a vaudeville show. No fancy effects are needed, nor are they desirable.

Sources of Advice and Assistance

on

Folk Festivals

State Colleges (Maryville, Kirksville, Cape Girardeau, Springfield,  
Warrensburg)

University of Missouri - Columbia  
Agricultural Extension Service  
Adult Education and Extension Service

Division of Fine Arts, State Department of Education, Jefferson  
City

Recreation Section, Division of Resources and Development, Jeffer-  
son City,

County Agents